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TAGS: PREL PREF PHUM FI CH  
SUBJECT: FINLAND: LET'S TALK DETAINEES, JUST NOT UIGHURS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Butler for reasons  
1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In an August 18 meeting with CDA Butler, Prime Minister Vanhanen's Senior Advisor Esko Hamilo expressed the Finnish Government's willingness to discuss the possibility of accepting detainees from Guantanamo. Hamilo welcomed the prospect of a visit from Special Envoy Fried in September. He said during Fried's visit they expected to receive a list of detainees to consider, and added quickly that they hoped the list would contain no Uighurs. The Finns are concerned about their relations with China; Hamilo said that Chinese diplomats in Helsinki have repeatedly warned them about the damage to bilateral relations should Finland accept any Uighurs. (NOTE: Hamilo's comments followed Special Envoy Fried's phone conversation with Foreign Minister Stubb on August 11 about a September visit to Helsinki, and after the Cabinet's Foreign and Security Committee took up the question of detainees on August 14. END NOTE.)

¶2. (SBU) China is extremely important to Finland's ailing and export-driven economy. As Finnish Minister of Trade and Development Paavo Vayrynen pointed out to a 240-strong Chinese business delegation in Finland in July, China is Finland's largest trade partner in Asia, and its fourth largest globally; approximately 240 Finnish companies have a permanent presence in China, and Finnish companies have invested roughly seven billion euros there. Also, as Nokia CEO Olli-Pekka Kallasvuo stated in an August 18 globalization seminar in Helsinki, China is Nokia's largest market.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Finnish officials have for months considered the possibility of accepting detainees, though they balked at any bilateral discussions before the EU arrived at a common position regarding Member States' acceptance of detainees. In the spring a Stubb senior advisor told P/E Chief that he thought a consensus in the four-party coalition to accept detainees would prove very difficult. With the EU having arrived at a common position and some Member States agreeing to accept detainees (and the more transatlantic National Coalition Party in a stronger position in government after better showings than Prime Minister Vanhanen's party in recent elections), the atmosphere in the Cabinet may have changed. In reporting on the Cabinet's August 14 discussion of the "detainee question" the main Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat cited "unofficial assessments" that the government would likely offer asylum to a small number of detainees. Whether acceptance is "likely" is unclear, but undoubtedly the Finns will give serious consideration to a (Uighur-free) list of detainees. END COMMENT.

BUTLER